

Claire Matturro

Kathie: We end in the Gulf

The Tuscaloosa bar is hot
as the afternoon that fills it.
The boys are soft and
chronic. Like children
they won't sit still. "Florida,"
I answer the boy and think
of fishermen out at dawn for mullet.

Two hours I listen to the boy talk.
The bar's no cooler. Nothing's fresh.
Behind the smoke, the dance floor
dissolves into wet circles on the table.
"Home," the boy offers. I try not to
touch him but sometimes the whiskey beats me.
His voice is the cry of gulls.

*Last year, dressed in embroidered silk,
Kathie took me home
to the island. We slept with
the Gulf of Mexico tearing away
the ground. Mornings Kathie repacked
the sand around the seawall.
"A hurricane would be better," she said.
I watched the mainland
and prayed the bridge would hold.*

*Waves sucked the sand
beneath us; Small fish darted
between our legs. "I can see
Mexico," she lied, and swam
toward the lights of a
ship heading to port.*

*Maybe Colorado would be safe,
she said, and took my silver cross.
Alabama sounded like land
that would hold beneath me.*

Kathie, the boy's touch
is as useless as the last swallow
of my drink. Every time I go back
the island is smaller.

Even the iron hills of Alabama
slip out beneath me.
in red streams that end in the Gulf.

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